



To: House Finance Committee

From: Shannon Carroll, President & CEO, Genesis Center

Date: April 8, 2021

Re: Support for H-5672, RI Child Care is Essential Act

For nearly 40 years, Genesis Center has been developing programs to fulfill its mission “to provide the highest quality education, job training and support services to people of diverse cultures so that they may achieve economic independence and participate fully in society.” As both a workforce training entity and operator of an Early Learning Center that employs childcare workers who consistently fall on the low-end of the wage scale, we see the impact that poverty has on our families and remain committed to finding opportunities to increase career mobility and sustainable wages. What is especially discouraging about the early learning field, a workforce comprised mainly of BIPOC women, is the workers struggle to support themselves and their families while providing the critical services of caring and teaching others’ children to keep our economy running. The pandemic pulled back the curtain to reveal the essential role of childcare workers, and it is time we adequately compensate these dedicated, hardworking professionals fairly.

At Genesis Center, we recognized the need to increase the compensation of our childcare workforce and have developed several strategies to fund wage progression. It has not been easy, and while we have made significant progress, we have yet to reach our goal. We have prioritized professional development to save our faculty from having to take out loans to meet the growing educational requirements for a field with little financial return on such an investment. We have attempted to make wages more competitive to minimize attrition to public schools or other jobs in higher paying industries. We have made efforts to show our workers that they are valued and respected for the important role they play in our economy, our society. But we have more work to do. We cannot do this alone and it is imperative that the state, through legislation such as Senate Bill 66, acts to improve the compensation and equity of our childcare labor force.

High quality child care is a vital investment in our economic future. It promotes children’s learning and development that will lead to better long-term educational outcomes and a stronger Rhode Island. In addition, it is a critical service that allows others to work knowing their children are well cared for. We need to recognize the importance of this segment of the labor force and offer sustained, competitive wages. We fully support the strategies and actions in the proposed legislation. We also support the priorities of the Right from the Start initiative that has thoughtfully outlined goals that must be achieved to promote equity and fair compensation for these essential workers.